Mary Noden

“‘Just practice!’”

To what extent is practice the key to success in orchestral auditions?

An exploration of the factors affecting an oboist’s performance at audition.
Abstract

Winning an orchestral audition is the aim of many instrumental musicians because it secures financial stability and musical fulfillment. Making the most of each audition is important because opportunities are scarce and a considerable amount of time and money is invested in each. The musicians of the jury each have individual musical tastes and therefore winning is never entirely within the musician’s control. Success at audition, however, is entirely possible for every candidate if they set their own goals. The methodology of the essay is to first define success at audition and find a way of measuring it. Then the process of gaining expertise and improving performance will be discussed, with data from scientific research and the views of established musicians providing information. There is a musical element also by improving three pieces from the oboe repertoire, submitted in the attached recording. This research suggests that success at audition can be viewed as subjective. Also that preparing for an audition, within a musician’s own definition of success, will also maximise chance of winning an audition. For example, a musician’s own view of a successful outcome might be gaining higher levels of musicianship and a thorough knowledge of audition pieces and these factors will also increase the likelihood of winning an audition.

Keywords

Oboe, cor anglais, orchestral audition, practice, orchestral excerpts.
# Table of Contents

1. **Introduction** .................................................................................................................. 1  
   1.1 Purpose of Study .............................................................................................................. 1  
   1.2 Biography ......................................................................................................................... 2  
   1.3 Background of the oboe and cor anglais ........................................................................ 3  
   1.4 Background of orchestral auditions ................................................................................ 3  
   1.5 Review of available resources .......................................................................................... 4  

2. **Aim** ................................................................................................................................ 6  
   2.1 Aim of essay and related musical element ............................................................... 6  
   2.2 Objectives ......................................................................................................................... 6  

3. **Methodology** .................................................................................................................. 7  
   3.1 Success at audition ............................................................................................................ 7  
      3.1.1 Defining success ......................................................................................................... 7  
      3.1.2 Measuring success .................................................................................................... 8  
   3.2 Audition preparation ....................................................................................................... 10  
   3.3 Standard audition repertoire .......................................................................................... 11  

4. **Discussion** ................................................................................................................... 12  
   4.1 Musical preparation ......................................................................................................... 14  
      4.1.1 Effective practice ........................................................................................................ 14  
      4.1.2 Efficient Practice ....................................................................................................... 14  
      4.1.3 Importance of expert teaching .................................................................................. 17  
      4.1.4 Example practice schedule ..................................................................................... 22  
   4.2 Physical preparation ....................................................................................................... 25  
      4.2.1 Reeds ......................................................................................................................... 25  
      4.2.2 Physical wellness ....................................................................................................... 26  
      4.2.3 Practical considerations for the audition day .......................................................... 29  
   4.3 Psychological preparation ............................................................................................... 29  
      4.3.1 Motivation & Commitment ....................................................................................... 29  
      4.3.2 Preparing to play with confidence ......................................................................... 32
4.3.3 Mental strategies for the audition day .................................................34
4.4 Factors outside the musician’s control ..................................................34
  4.4.1 The subjectivity of musical performance .........................................34
  4.4.2 External factors affecting an audition ..............................................36

5. Conclusion ...............................................................................................40
  5.1 Is practice the key to success in orchestral auditions? .........................40
  5.2 What next? .........................................................................................41

References ....................................................................................................42

Appendices ....................................................................................................i

  Appendix A: Personal probspiel ................................................................. i
  Appendix B: Table of orchestral excerpt asked for in 2016-2017 ............... ii
  Appendix C: Exam Concert Programme .................................................... v
1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of Study

It is commonly acknowledged that the world of orchestral music, in which I hope to base my career, is becoming increasingly competitive.¹ This means that the aspiring orchestral oboist must aim to achieve excellence in their field. This thesis will discuss whether or not practice is the most important factor and therefore determine to what extent practice, as opposed to other considerations, should be prioritised with time and effort. The thesis will incorporate information from studies of human learning to determine what type of preparation is most effective for the auditioning oboist.

To answer my research question, ‘To what extent is practice the key to success at orchestral auditions?’ the importance of other factors will be explored. These include innate musical ability, reed-making, tuition, the subjectivity of musical performance as well as physical and psychological preparation.

The purpose of the musical part of my project is preparing for orchestral auditions and therefore I have chosen audition related repertoire for my recital. The pieces will be presented in this thesis and used later as examples. They are standard oboe and cor anglais audition repertoire: Sibelius’ Swan of Tuonela, Ravel’s Le Tombeau de Couperin and the Strauss Oboe Concerto in D Major.

Common sense, as well as evidence from recent studies, shows that practice is crucial in the acquisition of mastery of a musical instrument.² For the auditioning musician it is of course essential to practise the orchestra’s chosen excerpts and pieces. It is, however, especially difficult for an oboist preparing for audition to balance practice with reed-making, which in itself is an extremely time-consuming activity.

There are five main areas which may affect success at audition identified in this thesis. These are: the definition of success at orchestral auditions (chapter 3.1), ‘Musical preparation’ (chapter 4.1), ‘Physical preparation’ (4.2), ‘Psychological preparation’ (chapter 4.3) and ‘Factors outside the musician’s control’ (chapter 4.4). Conclusions will be drawn throughout the thesis and then summarised in the conclusion (chapter 5.1). The most useful information for the future, from my own perspective as an auditioning orchestral oboist, will be highlighted, in the chapter ‘What next?’ (5.2).

¹ There are only 12 full-time contract symphony orchestras in the UK, on full-time salaries, with a maximum of 3 oboists in each. See BBC. ‘Listen Up! Festival of Orchestras: Professional Orchestras in the UK’.
1.2. Biography

Born in Aberdeen, Scotland I am the youngest of five children and grew up surrounded by noise and music of all kinds. My mother is an academic musician by training, having read Music at Cambridge University, and is a very fine pianist. Despite my brothers and sisters being musical none pursued music as career until myself. Perhaps I would not have done either if I had not discovered the oboe.

All of my family played piano to some extent and I enjoyed it very much but longed to play an instrument where I could be part of something larger. Playing the piano felt rather lonely and I wanted to try something different. I went to concerts and found myself drawn to the woodwind family because of the amazing colours of sound coming from them. When I shared this with my school’s Head of Music he left the classroom and returned almost immediately with a dusty oboe case in his hands and thus I began oboe at the age of twelve.

Long before my playing merited it I was in demand for orchestral projects. My first experience of playing the cor anglais, a rather decrepit instrument from the Aberdeen Music Service, came playing Dvorak’s Ninth Symphony when I was 16 with a youth orchestra. I remember being extremely nervous until I actually began my solo; I took a much slower tempo than we had rehearsed and the conductor looked rather taken aback! I suddenly felt so alive hearing the sound echoing back from the hall. Despite the steep learning curve, I felt completely in my element and soon put aside my original plans for a career in medicine as I thought seriously about becoming a musician.

I began college at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester and the University of Manchester’s academic music course. During my years in Manchester I studied with Melinda Maxwell and Rachael Pankhurst (cor anglais with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra) and learned to make my own reeds and the basics of playing. I followed this with a year at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with Gordon Hunt, Richard Simpson and Jane Marshall where I gained a Masters in performance and continued with my wind quintet as a Chamber Music Fellow.

After graduating I realised that the world of auditioning for orchestral jobs was a mystery to me. It was something quite different to a solo recital or indeed playing within an orchestra. I longed to discover how to stand out and show musicality at audition. I was determined to find out more so decided to continue working hard at improving and continue my education in Stockholm.
1.3. Background of the oboe and cor anglais

The oboe is one of the standard instruments of symphony and chamber orchestras and along with its larger ‘brother’ the cor anglais is often used for solo lines. The oboe’s and cor anglais’ predecessors, the *hautbois* and *obo de caccia* respectively, were used extensively in the Baroque Period. Composers such as J.S. Bach wrote beautiful obligato solos and others such as Vivaldi wrote concerti which are still a challenge on today’s instruments.

Throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries both instruments continued to be popular and therefore there is a huge amount of beautiful and challenging repertoire for these instruments.

The oboe has not always been entirely understood and appreciated by composers. Antonin Dvorak, for example, regularly scored the second oboe part extremely low in the register in a piano dynamic which causes difficulties because of the nature of beginning notes quietly in this range for the oboe. The legend goes that a second oboist had an affair with Dvorak’s wife and this was his revenge! Aaron Copland does not appear to have been enamoured with the oboe when he wrote:

> The oboe is a nasal-sounding instrument, quite different in tone quality from the flute...The oboe is the most expressive of the woodwinds, expressive in a very subjective way...More than any other woodwind the oboe must be well played if its limited tonal scope is to be sufficiently varied. 3

There is, however, a wealth of solos and tricky passages which showcase the beauty and versatility of the oboe within the orchestra and as a solo instrument and oboists are lucky to have over three centuries of music to enjoy. This also means that there are many possible orchestral excerpts to learn for auditions.

1.4 Background of orchestral auditions

The background of this thesis is competing in orchestral auditions. An orchestral audition is the most usual way in which orchestras recruit new members. Throughout the world’s orchestras the process is slightly different but here I will outline the most usual practice of the UK. The process starts with candidates responding to an advert often found on the orchestra's website or through a site such as ‘musicalchairs’. 4 This site, which is the ‘most widely read classical music jobs publication, with over 10,000 visitors a day’ 5 advertised only 67 oboe-playing auditions available world-wide in 2016. 6

---

4 ‘musicalchairs aims to provide a cost-effective means for orchestras, opera companies, conservatoires and schools to advertise vacancies to the highest possible calibre of candidate.’ Musicalchairs website.
5 See ‘Mission Statement’ from Musicalchairs website.
Applicants submit an application form, covering letter, CV and two referees’ details. The relevant orchestral section will look through the applications and select those whom they would like to hear at audition. Those selected will be sent musical excerpts from the orchestral repertoire to play unaccompanied and also one or two pieces of standard repertoire to play with piano. For oboists this is usually Mozart’s and Strauss’ oboe concerti. Sight-reading is often given and occasionally a chamber piece to play with other members of the orchestra for example the Nielsen woodwind quintet.

An audition may be screened so that the panel cannot see the candidate in order to make the process as fair as possible. There may be ‘knock-out rounds’ with repertoire for each stage, during which the aspiring musicians are eliminated from the process until there is one or several winners who proceed to work with the orchestra for a trial period before a final decision is made. In the UK trials can last months or years. This is a gruelling process but once a musician has an orchestral seat it is extremely difficult for them to be dismissed.7

In other European countries it is common for one person to win the job on the day of the audition and have a six-month or year-long trial which is essentially a probationary period. After this the musician and other orchestral colleagues decide whether or not to continue the job full-time. Conversely sometimes no-one is picked and therefore the job is re-advertised meaning that even the best oboist on the day is not guaranteed a trial.

1.5 Review of available resources

The highest levels of music-making allow virtuosity and expression to sound effortless and natural. Behind this performance thousands of hours in practice rooms and in lessons has brought the musician to this way of playing. There are several sources of information highlighting the importance of practice in achieving success in music performance.

Literature

The literature on strategies to support practice at a professional level is relatively limited8 and there is much more concerning early years and pre-conservatoire level musical development. A particularly valuable book for the musician preparing for audition is ‘Musical Excellence: Strategies and techniques to enhance performance.’9 Particularly useful within this book is chapter 5 by Harald Jørgensen ‘Strategies for individual practice,’ and chapter 4, ‘Measuring performance enhancement in music’ by Gary E. McPherson and Emery Schubert. One important study on expert performance is by

7 BBC News. ‘Welsh National Opera oboist was unfairly dismissed’. (2012).
Ericsson and Krampe and illustrates the importance of practice, most
especially ‘deliberate’ or meaningful practice over the course of ten years.\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{Online}
An excellent source of the importance of practice, and also specific help for
orchestral auditions, can be found online. The ‘audition hacker’ blog of
Metropolitan Opera percussionist Rob Knopper and Dr. Noa
Kageyama’s website ‘The Bulletproof Musician’ are full of articles and tips
for improving. They are a source of valuable and music-specific information.
Sites like these are aimed at helping musicians to maximise their preparation
and also cope well with the pressures of an audition. These two sites are co-
ordinated by musicians who are extremely well-informed but one should not,
of course, blindly trust practice tips and musical guides from the internet.

\textbf{Sheet Music}
There are already several books of orchestral repertoire (also known as
\textit{probspiel}) for the oboe as well as thousands of works on websites such as the
Petrucci Music Library. These \textit{probspiel} books are thorough but are rather
overwhelming as practice companions. In the Evelyn Rothwell books alone
there are 990 excerpts.\textsuperscript{11}

Although one may not receive the sheet music for an audition until a few
weeks before an audition there are several excerpts almost guaranteed to
feature in orchestral auditions. For oboists these include the \textit{Adagio} from
Brahms’ Violin Concerto, Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 4 slow movement
opening oboe solo and Rossini’s \textit{Silken Ladder Overture}. One particularly
illuminating book for the cor anglais player is Geoffrey Browne's \textit{The Art of
Cor Anglais} which has information on the composer, each excerpt and also
tips for practising and performance.

\textbf{Recordings}
We are fortunate to live in a time where it is incredibly easy to gain access to
infinite music in online music libraries and videos such as Spotify, iTunes
and YouTube. All the standard orchestral repertoire is readily available to
listen to or watch. Whilst there are many great recordings available there are
also some eccentric and even poor ones and so judgement and care must be
exercised. A favourite recording might feature eccentric tempi which, when
emulated at audition, might give the panel the impression of a lack of
knowledge of the excerpt.

A conclusion from the review of available sources is that recordings of music
and texts about audition practice technique are important resources for the
aspiring orchestral musician, however, an instrumentalist who blindly copies
others, is not an independent musician. It is important for the auditioning
oboeist’s success at audition, therefore, to find something unique to say
musically.

\textsuperscript{10} Ericsson and Krampe (1993).
\textsuperscript{11} Rothwell. (2010).
2. Aim

2.1 Aim of essay and related musical element

As previously stated the aim of this thesis is to determine to what extent practice is key to success in orchestral auditions. This essay will focus on the vital role of practice and how this relates to physical preparation (health and reedmaking), psychological elements and those factors beyond the auditioning musician’s control.

The project has two parts, a written thesis and a musical element in the form of a recorded recital. The musical element is linked to the thesis topic because the recital repertoire consists of three pieces of standard oboe orchestral audition repertoire. Also, the essay’s findings will be used to prepare for this ‘audition’ in the form of my final Masters recital.

2.2 Objectives of the project

The objectives of the written part of this project (thesis) and the musical part (recorded concert) share many objectives, these are listed and explained below.

1. The essay will define success in the context of orchestral auditions and explore how it can be measured. This definition will then serve as a way of measuring the success of the musical part of the project.

2. The role of practice in preparation for orchestral auditions will be analyzed in the essay and suggestions made on how practice can be maximised using specific examples from oboe and cor anglais audition repertoire. These suggestions will be used for preparation for the musical part of the project.

3. What else can be done to increase success, including physical and psychological preparation, will be identified in the essay and used during the preparation for the concert part of this project.

4. The essay will discuss the factors, seemingly outside the auditioning-musician’s control, which may affect the outcome and these will be taken into consideration after the concert when self-reflecting on my outcome of the musical performance.
3. Methodology

The method of my Masters project is two-fold, encompassing a musical project (concert submitted as recording) and written thesis. The written part will, as outlined in the ‘Aim,’ find a personal definition of success as mentioned in the title question, ‘To what extent is practice the key to success in orchestral auditions?’ The thesis will present a possible way to measure this success and will discuss the best ways to achieve it by examining how important the following factors are: the roles of practice, importance of expert teaching, reeds, physical wellness, motivation and commitment, psychogolgical preparation and the factors which are beyond the auditioning musician’s control.

The musical element will be to prepare and perform a programme of three audition pieces, Tombeau de Couperin, Swan of Tuonela and Strauss’ oboe concerto. My preparation and performance will be influenced by what I have learned in the written part of my project.

3.1 Success at audition

3.1.1 Defining success

What does success mean within the context of an audition? Winning the job is one obvious answer and, of course, this would be a successful outcome!

Success at audition is subjective to some extent and therefore it is possible to create a personal definition of success by setting goals for the audition. Success is the ’accomplishment of an aim or purpose.’\textsuperscript{12} This allows for the possibility of setting aims which are entirely within an auditioning-musician’s control. This is important for a musician’s self-esteem and sense of perspective.

In chapter 4.3. ‘Psychological Preparation,’ goal-setting will be explored as a factor affecting success at audition in the context of achieving motivation for and commitment to auditions. In chapter 4.4 ‘Factors outside the musician’s control,’ the subjectivity of musical taste amongst the participants of the jury is discussed. No matter how stylish, accurate and musical an audition performance is, the panel may not choose you because they have different musical tastes.

For me, success at audition would be taking my playing to a higher level through the challenges and impetus of the audition process. Making music is a life-long journey and experiments have shown that with effort, people of any age are able to make progress in the field of artistic development.

\textsuperscript{12} Oxford Dictionaries, ‘Definition of success in English’.
3.1.2 Measuring success

How can we measure success at audition in a useful way? In a business context projects are measured often by schedule, scope, budget, team satisfaction, customer satisfaction and quality of work. Auditioning seems rather different to business projects but on closer inspection perhaps they are comparable. See table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Project</th>
<th>Orchestral Audition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schedule: project on time?</td>
<td>Schedule: preparation plan fulfilled?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did you attend audition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope: features of project.</td>
<td>Goal: setting own musical goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget: how was money spent?</td>
<td>Budget: how was money spent?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For measuring success in my concert/audition May 2017 I can use this altered project review model. Here are my answers to the questions while the project of audition preparation is ongoing, eight weeks before audition.

Schedule: preparation plan fulfilled?
A practice schedule is essential as soon as you get the audition date and repertoire list. Rob Knopper, on his site ‘auditionhacker’, recommends three-steps for making a preparation plan.

1. Identify availability: work out how much time you have available each day for preparation.
2. Estimate the work: for each excerpt estimate the amount of time needed to get it to performance standard including learning the notes and self-recording.
3. Sort your work into days: go to the calendar and work out which day to work on each.

I have started planning practical considerations, submitting a photo for the programme, booking players and have my concert dress chosen. Practical considerations need to be carefully monitored since auditioning is a stressful situation and can seem overwhelming if not planned fully. For example, reeds are an important practical consideration with the timing of a project. It does not work to ‘blow-in’ new reeds a day or two before audition because the embouchure may become overly tired which results in lack of control and stamina at performance.

---

Did you attend audition?
Unless due to ‘an act of God’ I will attend the concert/audition which is, in itself, a valuable experience. I am therefore expecting to be successful in achieving this.

Goal: setting your own musical goals.
Choosing goals which are entirely within your influence is key to success at audition. Goals will be discussed in ‘Psychological preparation’ (chapter 4.3) and they should be as specific as possible.

Budget: how was money spent?
This project will not be expensive because the venue, players and advertising is organised by KMH, travel is local and so the only expenses are music, reeds, concert outfit and oboe maintenance which are negligible. It is important to appear smart and professional but spending a large sum of money on an audition outfit may have a negative affect on success by leaving the musician short of funds. Budget is usually an important consideration in the success of audition because musicians must travel across the world for auditions.

Personal Satisfaction: work/life balance.
This measurement of success at audition is often overlooked. It is important because if a musician sacrifices too much physically and socially the audition experience as a whole cannot be seen as fully successful. Leisure and relaxation are part of a fulfilling life and to win an audition at the expense of other important aspects of life leads to an altogether more negative experience. An imbalance can also negate preparation because it is not possible to perform optimally without adequate food and sleep etc. This will be discussed further in ‘Physical preparation’ (chapter 4.2).

Audition Panel: feedback.
Not every audition panel will provide feedback but many will. Not only does this make an audition more successful because it provides an opening to further learning, but panels generally understand that ‘everyone has a bad day in the office.’ Therefore there might be an opportunity to have a lesson with the principal player after receiving feedback; receive help on any issues and/or show how much you have improved and therefore be considered to work with the orchestra anyway. This surely would be deemed success at audition despite initial ‘failure’. I will receive post-recital feedback from my oboe teacher, Bengt Rosengren as well as colleagues in the audience.

Quality of work: Reflection on performance and plan for future.
Building and reflecting on my performance will be a vital part of my studies. The personal reflection and accumulation of ideas is very important and relevant to me as an oboist creating my own musical identity and ideas. I aim to collate information and ideas and turn these into my own musical language.
Therefore, success at audition is personal and for me it means:

- Fulfillment of a well-planned and personal preparation plan.
- Attending audition and committing to my performance in the moment.
- Setting and achieving my own musical goals which continue my general growth as a musician.
- Budgeting sensibly for the audition and adhering to it.
- Working hard on the audition while keeping a sense of perspective and looking after my other responsibilities. This includes caring for myself properly.
- Winning the audition and/or asking for feedback from the panel and absorbing the useful information.
- Reflecting on the audition and using it to plan the next steps.

3.2 Audition preparation

Audition preparation can be split into three different areas: musical, physical and psychological. In the context of orchestral auditions ‘psychological preparation’ means preparing mentally for the challenges of audition. The phrase ‘psychological preparation’ is chosen to avoid confusion with ‘mental practice’ which is more usually meant as musical practice without the oboe. For example, mental practice could be reading orchestral excerpts away from the instrument whilst hearing the music internally or ‘performing’ the concerto from memory without oboe or music. Mental practice on the oboe is a useful tool, however, within the context of this thesis ‘musical preparation’ refers to practice with instrument and ‘psychological preparation’ is concerned with the non-musical, mental preparation for example motivation and commitment to practice, confidence and strategies for the day.

Musical preparation does of course also include listening to recordings, analysing pieces and rehearsing with piano. This thesis will concentrate on exploring practice with the instrument and illustrating the links between success at audition and this type of practice. As well as briefly describing other forms of preparation for comparison.

In sports, like in other performance based work, a variety of techniques are used in order to enhance performance. Musical performers can also benefit from these strategies which encompass both physical or psychological techniques for improvement. Some can be undertaken to complement preparation whilst others are designed to be used specifically on the day of the performance itself. For example, a daily practice of meditation might be utilised to combat audition-day nerves whilst swimming regularly could help to increase lung-function during preparation for an oboe recital including the Strauss oboe concerto.
3.3 Standard audition repertoire

I will play three pieces in my final recital, 22\textsuperscript{nd} May 2017. These are Ravel’s *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, Sibelius’ *Swan of Tuonela* and Strauss’ oboe concerto. These pieces have been chosen because they are commonly asked for at orchestral audition and therefore linked to this thesis. The recital will also give me the chance to play these pieces in a supportive atmosphere with an audience of my teacher, friends and family with piano or woodwind quintet as accompaniment rather than solo as would happen in audition situation. I will use the findings of this written paper to assist my preparation. The programme for this concert can be found in appendix C.
4. Discussion

4.1 Musical preparation

*practise* - VERB - Perform (an activity) or exercise (a skill) repeatedly or regularly in order to acquire, improve or maintain proficiency in it.\(^14\)

4.1.1 Effective practice

There are many different styles and techniques for practising and it is important when preparing for audition to find the most effective ones. Since ‘practice makes permanent, not perfect’\(^15\) it is vital to practice the music correctly so as not to reinforce bad habits.

the term ‘practicing’ is deceptive. It should instead be thought of as ‘learning.’\(^16\)

Jørgensen and Lehmann in their Article ‘Does Practice make Perfect?’ comment on how much research needs to still be done ‘about the nature of particular aspects of practise.’\(^17\)

One excellent article into the most effective sort of practice is Ericsson and Krampe ‘The role of deliberate practice in the acquisition of expert performance’\(^18\). It highlights the type of practice which appears to be most effective is ‘deliberate practice’ also sometimes called ‘mindful practice’. Deliberate practice involves constantly analysis whilst playing and a teacher is invaluable for this (as is self-recording).

Useful audition practice should be thought of as completely separate to any other playing or performing and should not be confused with performing experience or playing for fun. Paid work, such as performing in an opera orchestra, or student projects involve performer giving their best in the moment. This means the musician will rely avoid risk-taking and therefore minimise self-critique and learning opportunities.

In contrast, deliberate practice would allow for repeated experiences in which the individual can attend to the critical aspects of the situation and incrementally improve her or his performance in response to knowledge of results, feedback, or both from a teacher.\(^19\)

Effective practice is not mindless repetition, although reinforcement through repetition does play a role in development of skills but only when coupled with effort, reasoning and cognitive intent.\(^20\) The repetitive nature of practising (commonly heard in conservatoire practice corridors) often sounds

---

\(^{14}\) Oxford Dictionaries, ‘Definition of *practise* in English.’
\(^{16}\) Myers. (n.d.).
\(^{19}\) Ibid. p.368.
\(^{20}\) Hammond, Austin, Orcutt and Rosso. (n.d.).
uninspiring. Various solutions have been suggested to make practice less boring including this particularly novel advice:

Almost drop the instrument, plectrum or bow. Throw your instrument in the air and catch it (wonderfully liberating, particularly good for conductors - and batons are cheap).\(^{21}\)

Before going to such drastic measures to relieve boredom the article: ‘Why the Progress You Make in the Practice Room Seems to Disappear Overnight’ by Christine Carter\(^{22}\) is illuminating on this subject. Carter suggests that we as humans cease to pay attention to repetition. Therefore we must change what we are practising regularly (perhaps every 5 minutes) in order to keep the attention on our focus.

Effective practice sessions are focused on improving weaknesses and build up strengths. Motivation is key since deliberate practice is not in itself pleasurable and is in fact very tiring; deliberate practice will continue to push limits to their maximum. To engage in deliberate practice requires that the performers need to work on tasks that are initially outside their current realm of reliable performance.

It is important to note the difference between play and practice. Play is intrinsically motivated and is its own reward. There is little or no emphasis on reflection or improvement and is really the polar-opposite to deliberate practice. Practice should be a highly structure activity with explicit goals to improve performance. Tasks must be invented to overcome weaknesses and performance should be monitored continuously during each session to continue improvement. This means that practice is not inherently enjoyable and therefore removed from the idea of playing for fun and also it provides no immediate financial rewards (indeed it is a financial investment to seek out teaching and music supplies). The motivation comes from the goal of improving performance.

It has also been suggested that after an initial improvement and development ‘most professionals in a domain reach a stable, average, undistinguished level of achievement within a relatively short time frame and maintain this mediocre level for the rest of their lives.’\(^{23}\) That is not to say that performance experience is not useful to the success at audition. One can reflect on performances to learn. The pianist Busoni is quoted as saying:

I never neglect an opportunity to improve, no matter how perfect a previous interpretation may have seemed to me. In fact, I often go directly from the concert and practise for hours upon the very pieces that I have been playing, because during the concert new ideas have come to me. These are very precious, and to neglect them…would be ridiculous in the extreme.\(^{24}\)

---

\(^{22}\) Carter. (n.d.).
\(^{24}\) Rowley. (1951), p.49.
Another master of the piano Sergei Rachmaninoff advocated slow practice as effective.\textsuperscript{25} The brain prefers this too because learning something new involves building a new neural circuit which is best done slowly.\textsuperscript{26} There is a substance in the brain called myelin, which insulates the axon of a neuron. Studies show that experts (in any field) have more of this substance. A Swedish study in 2005 found correlation between hours of practice and myelin development.\textsuperscript{27}

We know therefore that practice is related closely to being an expert in one’s field which of course affects the outcome of an oboe orchestral audition.

### 4.1.2 Efficient Practice

We have known, since the nineteenth century that memory is more effective when learning is distributed over a period of time, rather than in one hit.\textsuperscript{28} More recent research has observed two key relationships between expert performance and experience, shared by different areas of expertise. These are: that a greatly superior performance is only attained after extensive time immersed in a particular domain and that improvements in performance are only associated with many thousands of hours of specific practice and training.\textsuperscript{29} Assessments of the performance of experts over long periods reveal that that all individuals improve gradually.\textsuperscript{30} The importance of increasingly refined repetitions and learning skills in order of difficulty of accomplishment has also been proved to be important.\textsuperscript{31}

By contrast, the timescale for orchestral auditions is around four to ten weeks. Pressure to perform is huge and it is logical to assume that the more hours each day an oboist crams into musical preparation the better the chance of success. After all as the ballroom dance master Stephen Hillier said: ‘the amateur practises until he gets it right, the professional practises until he cannot get it wrong.’\textsuperscript{32}

Optimal practice time varies between people but studies in type-writing practiced showed that there are no benefits in practising for more than 4 hours and that after 2 hours levels of improvement begin to decline.\textsuperscript{33} Ericsson and Krampe report the best violinists practiced on average 19.5 eighty minute sessions each week which works out as an average of 3 hours 45 minutes each day.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{25}Griffin. (2013). p.36.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid. p.37.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid. p.27.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid. p.20.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid. p.411.
\textsuperscript{30} Ericsson. (2009).
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid. p.419.
\textsuperscript{32} Griffin. (2013). p.27.
\textsuperscript{34} Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Romer. (1993.) p.376.
Nathan Milstein, the renowned violinist, was interviewed and commented:

Practice as much as you feel you can accomplish with concentration. Once when I became concerned because others around me practiced all day long, I asked [my mentor] Professor Auer how many hours I should practice, and he said, ‘It really doesn’t matter how long. If you practice with your fingers, no amount is enough. If you practice with your head, two hours is plenty.’

When a musician has a time-limit, like in the preparation for an audition, it is important to concentrate not only on effective practice but efficient practice. As the guitarist Tom Hess writes: ‘Being effective means having the ability to achieve the desired result. Being efficient means being skillful in avoiding wasted time and effort.’

In a time-limited situation it can help to focus one’s practice time on exercises which have ‘high transferability,’ in other words which help more than one area of your playing at a time. For example an exercise with high transferability might be slow, legato practice of a specific fast passage from the audition repertoire. For example this *vivace* section from Strauss’ oboe concerto, movement III.

This will benefit tuning, phrasing, muscle-memory, stamina, breathing, awareness of smoothness between notes and development of consistent tone between registers. An example of low transferability would be practising a vibrato exercise, one note at a time with a metronome. This would increase an oboist’s control over and sensitivity to vibrato but does not benefit other areas of playing. This concept may help in the selection of what to practice.

---

36 Hess. (n.d.).
As Peter Spitzer, the co-founder of *Hope Street Music Studios* and a teacher with over 40 years’ experience explains:

Here is an obvious fact: You might be able to seriously work on one or two…things in an hour. There is no way that you could do justice to all of them. Here is the next obvious fact: You will have to choose which items are most important to you, and work on those. Here is the obvious conclusion: Over a long period of time (years), your choices will determine the kind of musician you will become… It’s really up to you!

It is important to be completely honest about what practice time is spent and what is most useful. If I was to make a list of things I plan to practice might look like this (in no particular order):

1. Long notes for stamina and tone with tuner for intonation.
2. Scales and arpeggios in every key (major, minor, thirds, chromatic, etc.).
3. Vibrato exercises.
4. Tonguing exercises: single, double, triple.
5. Studies and exercise books.
7. Music for upcoming paid or course related orchestral, chamber projects.
10. Memorising repertoire.
11. Reed-making.
12. Dynamic range.
13. Legato: intervals, especially octaves and fifths, to even-out tone throughout instrument.

I aim to be a reliable and professional musician, who is successful at auditions, comes to rehearsals prepared, with reliable reeds and a great ability to sight-read. Therefore, if I was to rewrite the list of things to practice with Spitzer’s comments in mind I might arrange the things to practice in order of importance and therefore time to spend on each.

   Within this I could find examples of scales and arpeggios, vibrato (when to play with or without vibrato and how much to use), tonguing exercises: single, double, triple, long notes (for stamina and tone with tuner for intonation), legato intervals, & dynamics).
2. Reed-making.
4. Tonguing exercises (this is something I particularly want to work on) Specifically Maurice Bourgue/Gordon Hunt tonguing exercise and Clarke’s Trumpet tutor excerise (which take in total 5 minutes).
5. Self-recording: to work on performance situation/playing and to self-monitor.
8. Memorising and circular breathing.

With the above exercise I have learnt to prioritise (and therefore helped myself feel better) by grouping practices together and removing those which are not useful for obtaining the goal of being the type of musician I hope to become. It is difficult to put ‘music for upcoming orchestral, chamber projects’ further down the priority list but as my general playing improves with practice of audition repertoire, reed-making and sight-reading so will my music-making in projects.

Sight-reading is usually asked for and is vital to the success of an orchestral audition. The ability to sight-read well is viewed by some musicians as an innate talent. They believe that either a musician is a natural sight-reader or is good at performing music from memory and that these two skills are mutually exclusive. Interestingly though, studies of sight-reading, which go back more than an hundred years, show the ability to play from memory enhances ability to sightread. The most strongly associated skill with good sight-readers is the ability to improvise37. Sight-reading is a learnable skill and therefore must be practised in order to be well-prepared and therefore successful at audition due to the fact that it is recognised as a big test in musicianship.38 Unfortunately for the time-pressed oboist it is not something which can be crammed and should be included at every practice session.39

Memorising and circular breathing are rarely required in my experience and therefore will be addressed when they are needed. Breathing exercises can be performed anywhere and therefore are perhaps better suited to another part of my routine - during yoga or meditation for example.

Technical excellence in music develops over years of deliberate practice and the development of musical style and interpretation continues to improve throughout the entire career. It is therefore very important to make sure you have longer term goals than the orchestral audition.

4.1.3 Importance of expert teaching

A key part of the most effective sort of practice ‘deliberate practice’ as discussed above is expert teaching. Mastering specific goals determined by an expert music teacher at weekly lessons, is an excellent way to reach a higher level of performance.40

37 Kageyama. (n.d.). ‘Are Great Sight-Readers Born or Made?’
The knowledge and experience of the teacher is a key to improvement and therefore to success at audition. The title of Bransford’s illuminating article on learning is that ‘It takes expertise to make expertise.’⁴¹ There is, however, a sizeable amount of literature which demonstrates that being an expert in a field does not guarantee that one is good at teaching.⁴² Research suggests that educators should focus on ‘enabling students to learn.’⁴³

Open communication between pupil and teacher is essential and it is equally important to be an effective learner if an oboist want to make full use of a teacher to help them improve, gradually internalising the many resources from their tutor and creating the ability to self-monitor and self-teach effectively.⁴⁴ ‘Coachability’ most likely depends on social issues of identity and are also very important in learning.⁴⁵

Teaching is vital for success especially in the context of audition preparation when time is limited since teaching can speed up the process of improvement by highlighting areas for improvement and giving immediate feedback. An expert teacher can also help with setting your musical goals and making a preparation plan.

An example of the goal-setting and clarity from teaching for audition can be seen below, in a simplified transcript of my lesson 16/01/17. In this lesson Bengt Rosengren and I covered two movements of Ravel’s Le Tombeau de Couperin (arranged for wind quintet by Mason Jones). The goals set in this lesson were used by me to create a deliberate practice plan for the week highlighting which technical or musical features to practice especially.⁴⁶ The keywords are highlighted in bold.

---

⁴² Ibid. p.434.
⁴⁵ Ibid.
⁴⁶ I have changed the narrative to first person in order to help me internalise the text when reading.
Prélude

- Do not think too much of the **tongue** – it is very easy to make it too much of a feature which breaks up the music. I have to have ‘long air’ over the tonguing, it is very important here. Even when it is **pianissimo** think longer phrases. I have been breaking them up a tiny bit with tonguing.
- **Grace notes** are fast but play them long and full of sound. Accents should not take much time. I have a slight tendency to hesitate with the air when tonguing. Just carry on!
- Get the **air-flowing** constantly through the phrase. I run out of air when using more of it but you must! Constant flow of air whether music is going up or down, tongued or smooth. The secret about this piece is I must have very, very calm air. The air must never be as busy as the fingers, otherwise I cannot time it, with long smooth air you can time it in any way you want.
- **Timing** - tonguing should not hold back. When I come close to an articulated note I hold back with the air a bit. The tongue spoils the air when you are preparing it. Play through the long note. Feel that you are on the beat.
- **Softer dynamic** if possible makes the opening more intense. **Pianissimo** but need a little louder in the orchestra. When I **diminuendo** I must still be generous with the sound and flow.
2nd section Figure 3-4

- **Long lines** in this simpler part go all the way through with the line, even if I tongue it in the middle.
- **Shorten the notes** slightly so I have time for the grace notes but keep direction and focus in the air.
- Commit to the top of the slurred arpeggio motif. **Full notes** then quick jump down across the barline.

3rd section to work on Fig. 8-9:

- Top notes should have a **full sound**.
- Not a sin if I want a smooth tongue at the top there. Be **quick jump down**, not much rest, there should be energy in the rest.
- All about the **air** there, push through even when it is I because it really needs it.
- **Intonation** of E can be a little bit sharp. Lifting the top finger makes it come out easier but it is sharper. Really have to practice it.
4th section to work on Fig 9-11

- **Long notes** should more intense and alive - even if I shorten them
  Otherwise the next note comes a tiny bit late.
- Play section without the grace notes so I can get the intensity and
  **forward-momentum**, then just add in the grace notes.

**Menuet**

1st section to work on beginning – figure 4

- **Tempo** was good. Can play a little bit faster in the orchestra.
- Feel that I have a very **smooth flow**. Focus with the support and the air.
  The character is innocent and **dolce** but behind this must be hidden a
  controlled
- Do not give minimum amount to make it sing, **be generous** and give
  reserves of air and support. Just try to keep it beautiful and singing
  and keep a very **dolce** intensity in it.
- **Keep it calm** up to the high D, not a **rallentando** necessarily.
- Tighten the **legato** when I go down so there is direction and intensity
  between the notes.
2nd section to work on figure 9-10

- **Intonation** on high E should be lower. Adjust the 3rd octave key!

3rd section to work on 4 bars at figure 15:

- In this arrangement the oboe does not have to play the high G of this section in Ravel’s original orchestration which is commonly featured in audition. I should **re-arrange** these four bars so the high G is included
- **Jump down** from the top G difficult, so use a lot of air going from difficult registers so I do not get scared and back off!
- **Alternative fingering option** for top G to practise.

Detailed advice like the above directly concerning the working material (in this case an orchestral excerpt) is typical of expert teaching. It fulfills the criteria of being advice that can be used in deliberate practice since it is very specific.

### 4.1.4 Example practice schedule

Part of a successful audition as described in chapter 3.1.2. ‘Measuring Success’ is the fulfillment of a well-planned and personal practice schedule. Once we realise that effective and efficient practice on the oboe is governed by complex execution, monitoring, planning, and analysis it becomes clear that audition practice calls for ‘an orderly and deliberate approach.’

It is vital in audition preparation to plan a schedule outlining each practice day so that an oboist can figure out how many hours of practice they have. During preparation a candidate will have a concerto or two to prepare as well as many pages of excerpts and sight-reading practice. Already it has been shown how important practice is for success at audition. This success is lessened if some excerpts or pieces are worked on significantly more than others because of bad planning. Similarly if sight-reading practice is completely neglected that may also spell disaster in audition.

---

In this article by John Dittert called: ‘A Shared Handout – How to Practice’ 48 six steps are suggested which I have personalised and will discuss below.

1. Why Am I Practising?

It is important to have practice goals 49 which help with analysis and mindful practice in order to be one’s own teacher during sessions. Put simply, in this case I am practicing to achieve success at audition. The decision of what to practice should have already been determined in the preparation plan for audition as discussed in chapter 3.1.2 ‘Measuring success.’

2. Get Ready to Practise

We know from the 1936 study of Dvorak, Derrick, Dealey and Ford that the best way to increase one’s typing speed is to work when one is most alert. 50 The same principal can be applied to practice; timing is important therefore and so practice should be executed when alert to maximise improvement. Sometimes it is best to practise at unsociable hours and I am a ‘morning person’ and hardly anyone is at college when I like to practice, early in the morning.

Oboists are famous for their paraphernalia (reeds, tuner, reed-knives, cleaning swabs etc.) and it is important to have everything necessary at hand during a practice session to avoid wasting time. In a music college or at home there will be things to distract you. Trying to preclude these things is a proactive and useful way to prepare. Turning the smartphone onto airplane mode and locking the door to discourage sociable people from saying hello right before a ‘eureka moment’ helps makes practice more successful.

Practising at home is difficult and is one of the challenges oboists face when they have graduated. It is advisable to find somewhere suitable to practise where you are not subconsciously worrying about whether any of your neighbours are doctors on call and that repeating the first four bars of Le Tombeau de Couperin for hours in different rhythms and dynamics will have them thinking of you during their next autopsy.

If you need to hire a practice room, do it! This expense should be taken into account for the budget part of your ‘audition success’ blueprint. If you cannot afford to hire a room perhaps come to an agreement with your local church or community hall. Having the right practice environment is crucial because the right sort of practice is absolutely essential and worrying about neighbours can end in bad posture and a smaller sound which will not lead to a successful audition.

3. Warm Up

This area of practising a body warm-up is something generally ignored by the instrumentalists of my acquaintance who tend to focus on what needs to be done immediately. Having researched the topic and read that beyond 4 hours of practice is not proven to be beneficial I have shifted my view-point radically from ‘whilst you’re not practising someone else is getting better’ to ‘quality not quantity.’ Making the very most of practice time, looking after my body and ensuring practice is as efficient as possible has led me to become interested in developing an effective warm up to prepare the body and the mind. My own warm up is recorded in the next chapter 4.2.2 ‘Physical wellness.’

4. Practice with focus

This has been covered in the chapters on effective and efficient practice but there is one especially useful formula for focused practice which is outlined below. An experiment by Cleary, Zimmerman and Keating in 2006\textsuperscript{51} proved that novice basketball players improve significantly in just 12 minutes with a simple 3-phase self-regulation model.

- **Plan!**
  Ask yourself: How do I want it to sound? Hear it in your head as you read it through. What did my teacher specify last time and what techniques must I use to achieve it?

- **Self-monitor while playing:**
  For example, am I squeezing in my embouchure too much? How is the air-support?

- **Reflect and strategise! After playing.**
  Was I successful? i.e. Was the intonation good? If not, why not? What do I need to make technically to get it in tune next time?

5. Write It Down

As well as being a useful tool to remind yourself what you have been working on the next day and to track your progress writing can help you to understand more clearly what it is that you wish to improve or what you particularly like about what you are doing already. As the writer Gregory Ciotti explains: ‘writing allows abstract information to cross over into the tangible world.’\textsuperscript{52}

6. Step Six: Rinse and Repeat\textsuperscript{53}

There has been some absolutely fascinating research recently which sheds light on how our brains form memories and process new information making links between what we know and what we recently have learned. The brain requires a large amount (approximately 20\%) of all of the energy the body produces and this goes up 5-10\% when it is concentrating hard on something.

\textsuperscript{52} Ciotti. (2014).
\textsuperscript{53} Dittert. (2008).
Whilst we are focused entirely on a task, for example when a musician is practising a tricky excerpt, certain scattered parts of the brain become less active. These parts fire up again when a person begins relaxing and letting the mind wander\textsuperscript{54}.

These parts of the brain are called the default mode network (DMN) and are thought to be responsible for consolidating what we have learned and also for shaping our personal identities. This process works best when you are resting, sleeping and especially in those moments just prior to sleep. It has been shown however that the DMN sparks up even when we blink. Therefore perhaps just closing our eyes for a few seconds during practice sessions could help to internalise what we are learning and suggests we should be considering having a nap during the day after practising.

4.2 Physical preparation

4.2.1 Reeds

Oboists who make their own reeds spend long hours working on the reed-making. Reliable reeds are a huge factor in the success of an orchestral audition for an oboist. Unfortunately a reed’s life is finite due to the organic material it is made from (a type of giant grass called \textit{arundo donax}). A recent study showed that wind instrumentalists practised considerably less than their string and piano playing counterparts with the notable exception of oboists\textsuperscript{55}. This is perhaps due to the practice time spent on reed-making or the extra practice time needed to deal with temperamental reeds.

My own solution for maximising success at audition through good reeds is to make my own. Although time consuming this gives me as much control as possibly over the outcome. By selecting tubes of cane, gouging, shaping, tying on, profiling and finishing by hand, each reed is monitored throughout the process. Reeds should be entirely finished and ‘blown-in’ at least five days before audition in order to be considered as candidates and there should be an option of two (or even better three possibles) which are practised on regularly.

Organisation is key here and it is important to know what is in the reed box so that one does not pick up the wrong reed in a state of panic on the audition day. I have developed a system in my reed box (which is numbered cor anglais reeds 1-3 and oboe reeds 1-9). The following factors are then recorded for each reed and edited as they age.

- Pitch: 440/441/442.
- Tone quality: rating/10.
- Dynamic range possibility: \textit{ppp-fff}.
- Comfort: How ‘tough or easy’ it is to blow/10.

\textsuperscript{54} Jabr. (2013).
• Appearance: marked/10. This may seem trivial but a chipped reed can affect confidence as well as sound and response.

• Aperture: description of how symmetrical/open/closed the reed opening is.

• Date scraped: reeds should be blown in for 30 minutes/day over a week to allow them to last longer.

• Airtightness: whether or not it needs extra sealant eg. Clingfilm.

• Play today? Yes/No.

4.2.2 Physical wellness

Playing the oboe is tiring mentally and physically. It is important to eat well, sleep and rest to avoid injury and fatigue.\textsuperscript{56} Optimal health and fitness contribute to stamina and also potentially aid performance anxiety management.

It has already been mentioned that repetition is a key requirement when developing the complex muscle movements required in performing music.\textsuperscript{57} It is also essential for musicians to continue repeating after playing a passage correctly.\textsuperscript{58} Effectively practising the oboe is tiring on the mind and the body. If an injury prevents a musician from preparing for, or even attending, an audition then it can be extremely frustrating as well as a waste of money. Therefore oboists need to make sure they take care of our bodies. Like athletes, musicians can perform more efficiently when they are physically warmed up.\textsuperscript{59}

Keeping flexibility in the back and shoulders is especially important for oboists and this also helps stay as physically relaxed and confident as possible. I have designed this warm up to help with this.

Practice warm up.\textsuperscript{60}

1. Focus.

I begin each day in a ‘power-pose’ with my hands on my hips. I hold the stance for two minutes reciting an affirmation about what to focus on that practice session. This stance has been proven to lower cortisol (the stress hormone) as well as heighten testosterone (an important hormone for self-esteem.)\textsuperscript{61} The affirmation is useful for increasing focus on the primary goal for the practice session, for example: ‘I know my support is working properly because I hear it in my sound.’ Or, ‘I feel the connection of the air between my abdominal muscles and fingers.’

\textsuperscript{56} Research done in Texas showed that breaks are effective see Griffin. (2013). p.29.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid. p.24.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid. p.27.
\textsuperscript{59} Horvath. (2013).
\textsuperscript{60} I have taken inspiration from an article by Grossman and Robson. (n.d.).
\textsuperscript{61} Cuddy. (2012).
2. Stretches and strengthening exercises.

An oboist must be careful to counteract the forward-pull of playing the oboe which can lead to bad posture and pain in the arms, back and shoulders. These three stretches are demonstrated in an excellent video online which is aimed at posture correction.\(^ {62} \)

Some of these stretches can be done whilst holding an oboe reed the opposite way around in your embouchure. That is to say with the tube or staple in your mouth. This is useful to ‘wake-up’ the embouchure and get used to an open sensation in the mouth to prevent-squeezing the reed.

- Doorframe chest and shoulder stretch: hold onto door frame with arms up. With arm slightly bent step forward away from frame feeling the stretch in pectoral muscles. One side at a time to focus on correct stretch
- Against wall chest opener: sitting with back against wall put arms up against wall with elbow bent at 90 degrees. Then stretch arms up keeping back, shoulders, arms and wrists in contact with wall.
- Shoulder strengthen and flex: ‘face-pulls’ holding light weights (or instruments).
- Roll shoulders forwards and back (10 times) with arms by sides. Then repeat involving whole arms held straight and circling like windmills.

3. Movement for both hemispheres.

- Tapping across your body and crossing arms to massage the earlobe on the other side stimulates cross hemisphere brain activity
- Specific attention to finger exercises is helpful prior to practice. Wrap fingers of one hand around the thumb of the other and gently squeeze, then pull it along it, massaging. Repeat with each finger and then the other hand
- Squeeze the palm of each hands with thumb pressure at three points paying particular attention to any muscle knots

4. Awareness of posture.

Mentally scanning one’s body, in order to become aware of the sensations whilst holding the oboe is very useful. Much of what we do as orchestral musicians is sitting down however during lessons, auditions and solo performances we stand. When sitting we should have the same feeling in our upper body as when we stand. It is important therefore to become comfortable with playing standing up.

- Close your eyes, shift from one foot to the other slowly and mindfully to find your balance.

---

\(^ {62} \text{GuerillaZen Fitness. (2017).}\)
• Then begin a mental body scan: going up from the feet, through the legs, pelvis, back shoulders, down the arms, back up into the face and head.
• Any points of discomfort should be observed by your mind and assessed.
• To reduce tension (often found particularly on the right arm and shoulder of oboists) close your eyes and imagine a stream of water is passing the arm and shoulder removing any tension. Let your arm sag and imagine the water bubbling around it. Often after this the tension is much less and the shoulder even appears to be lower!

5. Focused breathing.

Fundamental for wind-players this also helps to leads to a greater awareness of self in the moment
• Holding the oboe or cor anglais up as if to play and find a neutral pelvis (which is essential for a full and supported breath).
• Close your eyes and begin to audibly breathe. I like to have my backwards reed staple (tube) without the reed in my mouth to relax embouchure and also feel the resistance of an oboe without the sound so breathe through my nose.
• Inhale on three counts and exhale on three counts. Feel the abdominal, intercostal and oblique muscles move out on the inhalation and in on the exhalation with each breath.
• Be aware of this sensation and try to bring awareness to while playing

6. Airflow.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{\gapped{B\flat\ C\#\ D\ E\ F\ G\ A\ B}} \\
\text{\gapped{B\flat\ C\#\ D\ E\ F\ G\ A\ B}} \\
\text{\gapped{B\flat\ C\#\ D\ E\ F\ G\ A\ B}} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Scales (as above) slowly and without tongue (starting the note with air only) are a great way to get to know your reed that day and ‘wake-up’ your airflow. Pay particular attention to the downwards thirds and making the notes completely legato with air and fingers.

7. Listening.

Often playing by ear is neglected in classical music but it is very useful for confidence, and also enjoyment, to develop the ear so that one can play anything you can sing. To be able to hear a note and immediately find it or to see a note and hear it before playing (a sort of oboe-specific perfect-pitch) is important for sight-reading and those rare moments in the life of a classical musician when improvisation is called for. Good aural training also has been linked with sight-reading ability as noted in chapter 4.1.2. In an audition context to hear the notes accurately before playing an excerpt (which are
always unaccompanied) is an advantage. I like to practice it a little at the end of my warm-up to wake up the ears.

Sleep is another key factor of physical wellness and has been shown to be important for gaining expertise in music. In Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Romer’s study the best violinists slept for significantly longer than the less accomplished violinists at an average of 8.6 hours each day. The two best groups also appeared to sleep more in the afternoon showing that perhaps an afternoon nap is a good thing.\(^{63}\) This correlates with the findings mentioned in chapter 4.1.4 that the brain’s default mode network works to consolidate new information while our eyes are closed.

### 4.2.3 Practical considerations for the audition day

The audition process is mentally stressful but there are some practical things one can do to aid success in advance: instrument care, outfit selection and making sure your sheet music is in organized are all fundamental. Clothes for oboists do not just have to be smart and professional, it is important that the player can breathe fully and without feeling self-conscious. Black trousers and a (loose-fitting) shirt or blouse can never be faulted.\(^{64}\)

On the day itself the oboist must carry safely two instruments, reeds, music, accessories (cleaning swabs, blotting paper, instrument stands) and optionally water into the audition room. With so much to carry accidents do happen with disastrous effects at audition. This should be considered in advance. No matter how well prepared with practice and preparation one is, a dropped and damaged instrument will immediately spoil the success of any audition.

It is clearly important to come across the panel as calm and professional; not to be remembered as the candidate who drops the music or spills water on the floor in a panic. Nobody wants to have someone sitting next to them in the orchestra who is disorganised and creates an atmosphere of unrest. The teacher, composer and pianist Adrian Rowley warns against coming across in this way ad describes it as ‘fussing.’

```
The fusser is in a constant state of ferment, and carries about with him an atmosphere of unrest
Beware of him.
Avoid him….
And so – still again – I repeat: - Beware of the fusser.\(^{65}\)
```

Recording the audition (if possible) for later analysis is recommended by Rob Knopper and is extremely useful. He recommends not to ask permission but discreetly place the recording in your pocket or bag in the audition room. Obviously if told expressly that recording is forbidden this is not recommended! A recording of audition is hugely useful for learning and significantly increases the success of an audition by giving immediate and useful feedback.

---

\(^{64}\) Kwok-Adams. (2014).
4.3 Psychological preparation

4.3.1 Motivation & Commitment

Clearly practice is key to success in audition but what makes the oboist practice the many hours enough to perform to their best? Motivation and commitment are deeply connected to success at audition because they cause the musician to prepare. The advice from sportsman Ed Macauley commonly repeated is: ‘when you are not practicing, remember, someone is.’ Setting goals, spending time on reflection and hand-picking weaker areas of performance to focus on are proved to be important in the area of gaining expertise. When there is an audition day fast approaching it is easy to feel under pressure and that, every moment you are not practising someone else is improving! Motivation can be external (factors outside the candidate) or intrinsic (from within).

Intrinsic Motivation has been studied since the 1970’s and is understood to exist within an individual and is not reliant on external considerations. As a musician preparing for an audition clearly we are motivated by the hope for success at this audition which is an external motivator. Striving for intrinsic motivation is key in order to continue to improve. Continual improvement is one of the rewarding things about being a musician. Also, if a musician’s motivation is only external then a ‘thanks but no thanks’ from an audition panel may have a long-lasting and negative effect on future endeavours.

Practice is more effective when it is systematic, structured, goal-orientated and thoughtful. As discussed above, this type of practice, ‘deliberate practice’ is draining and therefore it is easy for the preparing oboist to find excuses not to practice: ‘I am exhausted from playing in rehearsals all day’ or ‘reed-making is more important at the moment.’ This inevitably leads to a subsequent lack of confidence and motivation. One possible way to deal with lack of motivation for practice, and also to cope with stress produced by upcoming concerts, is to have short to long-term goals as suggested by the American music teacher Catherine Smith-Jones. She writes:

Your practice should have long-term, medium-term, and short-term goals. What are your long-term goals as a musician? Your long-term goals will help set your medium-term goals…Your medium-term goals, plus any performances or lessons coming up soon, will determine your goals for this practice session…Stay focused on what you want to accomplish right now, today, and on how that will help you get where you want to be.

---

68 Schmidt-Jones. (n.d.).
Here is an example of my own personal long-term, medium and short-term goals in a table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SETTING GOALS TO MAXIMISE ACHIEVEMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job as an oboist/cor anglais player in an orchestra in Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Win an audition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain experience in orchestras as extra player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upload recordings website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be ready for auditions coming up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply for oboe jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play and record an excellent final recital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have reliable and plentiful oboe and cor anglais reeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be prepared for lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate feedback from teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record lessons and decide on daily tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberate practice (average of 2-3 hours daily)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reed making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing to orchestras and organising extra work auditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping diary up-to-date and ensuring readiness for work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practising languages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Elite performance continues to improve and peak performance is nearly always many years, and even decades, after beginning. Therefore goals should continue to be reset once achieved.

According to neuroscientist Steve Peters it is not motivation but commitment that is most important in achieving your goals. In his best-selling book ‘The Chimp Paradox’ he writes:

Motivation…is a feeling based on emotion. Motivation generally happens when there is a great reward to gain. Motivation is helpful to drive us on but it is not essential to success. It is unrealistic to expect to ‘feel motivated’ every day, no matter what you are doing…Commitment on the other hand…does not depend on feelings. Commitment means following a plan even if you don’t feel like it on that day.

It is easy to get frustrated and tense by such minutely detailed work as is required for audition preparation. Therefore it is useful to decide in advance what pitfalls there might be so they can be addressed in advance. The brain wants to do thing the easy way (The Rule of Least Effort) and so can rebel when forced to fixate on problems in order to resolve them. One can forget the importance of fundamental technique and music-making such as musical phrasing, sound-production and stance. The experience of learning, whether positive or negative, affects motivation for future tasks.

There is a useful advice from Catherine Schmidt-Jones in her article ‘A Guide to Great Home Music Practice.’

Cool Down: While you were practicing the hard parts of your music, you may have become tense or frustrated, or forgotten to sing or play musically or with good tone quality or technique. End your practice time by playing or singing something you

70 Ibid. p.252.
72 Schmidt-Jones. (n.d.).
like that is easy for you. Relax and enjoy “performing” it for yourself, playing with your very best technique and musicianship. This is a good time to go through some of your already-established repertoire, to keep it polished, comfortable, and ready to perform.

4.3.2 Preparing to play with confidence

What is different about an orchestral audition to other performances is that much of the music the oboist plays is performed out of context, it is played solo when it is meant to be accompanied by orchestra. Choosing an audition-based concert came into my mind because I have played many audition ‘favourites’ only in an audition environment. Auditioning in front of a panel can feel constrictive and as a result it is difficult to fully commit to the music, especially with no musical context other than in one’s head. I hope the musical performance part of this project will help me change these feelings and give a context to the excerpts through a detailed knowledge base that I will remember standing alone in front behind an audition screen.

James Austin’s research into motivation and achievement among elementary band students found that self-esteem was related to motivation but not achievement.\(^{73}\) Perhaps this means that the auditioning oboist should not be anxious over his or her view of themselves or their playing but instead focus on the commitment which allows us to work hard and perform well. Lack of self-esteem can, however, manifest itself as extreme anxiety and stage-fright which can damage chance of success at audition by causing a lack of breathe control, shaking or even avoidance of playing in the audition completely. There are many resources to help to create a positive mental state to increase feeling organised, calm and positive so that as musicians we can prepare for auditions optimally.

This thesis will not attempt to discuss in detail techniques for psychological preparation but there are three especially relevant way I believe one can prepare for auditions. These are:

- Mock auditions.\(^{74}\)
- A ‘pre-shot routine.’
- Mindful listening or meditation.

Mock auditions prepare for the audition situation through psychological preparation and visualisation.\(^{75}\) They can be maximised by inviting feedback from a large number or people, recreating different audition situations, practising communication with the ‘panel,’ taking feedback to change the playing within the audition setting and recording the audition to compare with self-recordings to see the effect nerves had on the performance.

---


\(^{74}\) A mock audition is a performance in conditions which are as similar as possible to those of an audition. For example, the candidate plays behind a screen, without speaking and performs the excerpts asked for by the audience, stopping when asked etc. Then the musician receives feedback which can be used to improve.

\(^{75}\) Busch. (n.d.).
The ‘pre-shot routine’ is recommended by Matt Howard, percussionist in the L.A. Philharmonic who believes that they made a huge difference in helping him to win his audition there.\textsuperscript{76} The ‘pre-shot routine’ is a concept taken from golf in which players regularly take practice swings, imagine the shot going well and even occasionally have superstitious gestures e.g. touching a pocket. Within the concept of oboe auditions this routine is very similar but it is advisable not to play many (if any) test notes in audition. The panel will be listening to everything and some panels frown upon this also.

With the example of \textit{The Swan of Tuonela} the ‘pre-shot routine’ might consist of:

- Picturing the scene: the lake in \textit{Tuonela}, the land of the dead.
- Internally hearing the opening line in A minor rising in the \textit{divisi} strings from the bass, through violas, violins II, violin I.
- Subdividing the long notes to feel the crotchet pulse.
- Hearing exactly where the tuning of the opening D (concert G) the cor anglais will begin on and how it will sound within the audition room.
- Activating the abdominal muscles of breath support.
- Breathing-in in the tempo of the upcoming phrase.
- Tongue on reed.
- Forming embouchure and relax it a little more (likely to squeeze because of nerves).
- Start airstream with the exact pressure you know will create the sound needed.
- Release the sound by removing the tongue from reed.

Clearly there are a lot of steps and therefore internalising and practising this ‘pre-shot routine’ is essential in order for it to be useful. The book ‘Golf’ is not a Game of Perfect\textsuperscript{77} by Dr. Bob Rotella is the book which Matt Howard recommends and it gives much more detail on the benefits and background of the concept.

Practising mindful listening so that one can listen carefully and subjectively to sound helps music-making generally and is useful for on the day of audition when one is forced to listen to other players (and yourself) without reaction. It can be practised in advance away from the practice room.

For instance, when we walk, shut the ear (on occasion) to every sound except (shall we say?) the rattle of cart wheels. Or, on another occasion, shut out everything but the sound of birds. And so on.\textsuperscript{78}

Bringing our awareness constantly back to music is vital when preparing for audition and these three steps combined may help to maximise practice.

\textsuperscript{76} Knopper. (n.d.). ‘How Matt Howard used Mental Practice to win LA phil.’
\textsuperscript{77} Rotella. (1995).
4.3.3 Mental strategies for the audition day

There are some things about the audition day that it is difficult to prepare for in advance. One is dealing with meeting and hearing other candidates warm up (it is common to all be in one or two rooms together) which can increase anxiety and stress. Unfortunately elevated emotional levels may become debilitative, affect success and inhibit risk taking which in turn might lessen chance of success. Stress can be positive, however, and this is important to remember.

I have found some useful strategies to focus on, with the help of additional material on managing nerves, for increasing success at auditions.

Alec Rowley’s book ‘Do’s and Don’t for musicians’ is full of useful and humorous advice to remember on the audition day:

- It is not the one who is making the biggest splash that is having the best bath.
- Get your musical thoughts in order before you begin
- You can mould your audience to your thoughts.

It is also useful to work out how panels ‘mark’ candidates by spending time on a panel if at all possible. Having been part of an audition panel recently I could experience what the process feels like and importantly noticed that not everything the panel writes is negative, it could just be a doodle!

4.4 Factors outside the musician’s control

4.4.1 The subjectivity of musical performance

In most professional domains including music performance it is extremely difficult to measure the levels of personal performance objectively.  

In all fields of human pursuit where fine esthetic discriminations are made, we can never know everything about the things we wish to measure. Hence, all measurement is subject to some kind of coloration by error, which leads to the serious implication that it is impossible to judge with perfect accuracy and, even worse, fairness.

Orchestral auditions for oboists are no different and a prime example of subjectivity in appreciating music performance is found in the difference

---

82 Ibid.
83 Ibid. p.67.
between European and American styles of playing. Recently a reviewer caused a sensation by giving a less than flattering review of an oboe recording including the comment ‘get this album if you are a fan of the American style of oboe playing.’\textsuperscript{86} He was, most decidedly, not a fan of this style of playing. It is not advisable to try to change one’s style of playing for an audition because it is likely to be deeply ingrained and a tied up with the individual musician’s technique. In the case of an oboist it will be affected by reeds, lip, tongue and jaw position, make of instrument and the way of blowing. As the Gewandhaus orchestra’s percussionist Tom Greenleaves explains:

\begin{quote}
To win any job, against such enormous competition, you have to leave a very, very special impression on an orchestra. This only happens when an exceptionally talented musician goes out on stage in front of the orchestra and bares his/her soul and is totally and utterly convincing. And being convincing entails being absolutely yourself and expressing the musician you truly are. In my experience, musicians auditioning for us who are trying to emulate what they think is ‘the Gewandhausorchester way,’ or what they think we want to hear, just don't convince.\textsuperscript{87}
\end{quote}

The audition panel should of course be considered as much as possible. The qualities looked for in a musician at audition are listed in job descriptions and described in feedback from orchestral auditions. These vary slightly depending on the position within the section. For example in the context of a principal oboe seat the section will want a player who is motivational and inspiring \textsuperscript{88} and in a co-principal (or second player) an ‘effective and committed team-player’\textsuperscript{89} is asked for.

Wherever one sits within the oboe section it is likely that you will move around and be required to play on any part at some point during the year. The idea, therefore, that a second oboist must be humble and quiet whereas a principal should be hugely confident and outgoing is a rather outdated notion.

The qualities that are repeatedly asked for in job descriptions could be split into musical and personal qualities and are in the tables below. These are taken from the job descriptions of advertised positions within the last year from five professional orchestras. Four from the UK and one from the Netherlands.

\textsuperscript{86} Lebrecht. (2016).
\textsuperscript{87} Greenleaves. (2017).
\textsuperscript{88} Royal Opera House. ‘Job Description: Section Principal Oboe’.
\textsuperscript{89} BBC Symphony Orchestra. ‘Job Introduction: Co-Principal Oboe’.

These qualities should be considered both in the practice-room with musical preparation and on the day of the audition to encourage the candidate to show that their personal qualities include being open, friendly and professional.

4.4.2 External factors affecting an audition

The judgement of an audition panel is, of course, largely influenced by the musical performance of the candidate auditioning, but the ways in which individuals sitting on the jury draw conclusions about the auditioning candidate’s ability can be quite different. Influences on the jury include more than the musical performance itself and some are completely outside of the candidate’s control.

These can include memory influences, for example when the jury member is primed with prior knowledge of the musician’s performance having heard them in concert before. \textsuperscript{90} Also, first impressions of the candidate’s performance are particularly strong when the first impression is negative and has the effect of making the judge less likely to integrate new information (for example better playing) into their overall impression.\textsuperscript{91}

The mood of the jury member can be changed by the music performed and a particularly important piece of information for the auditioning musician is to understand a process called ‘habituation’ which means that an individual will become bored if there is not enough variety in interpretation and expression. Therefore variety within repertoire chosen, if there is free choice, and also within the pieces is paramount in optimising the enjoyment of a panel of judges and therefore a positive assessment.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid. p.72.
Familiarity of the musical panel with the music performed also influences the impression of a piece. Judges have been found to be more severe when initially hearing new works and then become more forgiving after exposure due to understanding the complexity of the music and the technical difficulties for the performer. \(^{92}\) Massive exposure to one piece, as will often happen at oboe auditions with Mozart’s oboe concerto for example, suggests an inverted U-curve of the preference of the jury. The preference will rise with familiarity and then decline as the listener becomes fatigued with the piece from over exposure. \(^{93}\)

The ‘halo effect’ of an assessor is when one factor is singled out which is felt to be particularly important by the judge. \(^{94}\) This can be used to advantage in audition by exploiting this particular aspect of performance in audition if it is known to be important to members of the audition panel.

One view of professional success holds that individuals have varying degrees of inborn capacities that cannot be changed through practice and it is this which determines success to a large degree. \(^{95}\) Another possible area of influence on audition success which is not controllable by the auditioning oboist is a possible correlation between the level parental support of musicians from an early age and success. Research has highlighted this as an an important factor in musical excellence from retrospective interviews of international-level performers. \(^{96}\) There is, however, an opposing school of thought suggesting that the more ‘talented’ children improve faster simply because they do more practice. \(^{97}\)

However much the musician tries there is only so many factors under their control that influence the outcome of the audition. It may be that the panel is looking for something completely different in terms of sound, experience or even personality. For example a principal player in a professional orchestra in the UK confided to me that they ‘much prefer to play next to a man’ within the orchestra. Screened auditions aim to remove some of this bias but these are not common practice in the UK and are commonly removed for the final round of auditions.

It is important to highlight that when auditioning the aspiring orchestral oboist can only do their best and perform in a way that they truly believe in. The aforementioned chapter ‘Measuring Performance Enhancement in Music’ by McPherson and Schubert in Williamon’s ‘Musical Excellence’ book includes a model showing the practical implications of much of the material discussed

\(^{93}\) Ibid.
\(^{94}\) Ibid.
\(^{95}\) Ibid.
\(^{97}\) Ibid. p.413.
above. I have made my own personal version which is included below. This ‘Johari winow’ divides our interactions with others into four areas:

Public area: an individual will be aware of some behaviours and motivations that are also noticeable to others.

Blind area: some behaviours and motivations will be inaccessible to the individual but accessible to others (hence, this is like a blind spot for the individual).

Secret area: the individual will hide certain motivations and behaviors, and therefore this is the secret part of the model.

Hidden area: there is a part of the behavior and motivation of which neither the individual, nor others is aware.

The factors included in this ‘Johari Window’ below are those which are likely to influence the outcome of an audition. It has been personalised to reflect the behaviours and motivations of the candidates and judges at an oboe orchestral audition. In order to increase control over the outcome of auditions it is important for the auditioning musician to try to expand the ‘public area’ to encompass more of those things in the other quadrants. For example the performer should aim for an understanding of their own stage-presence and aim to reflect the tone of the music with their body language which is currently listed below in the ‘blind area.’

The practice of using screens to hide the auditioning performer from the jury eliminates some interactions between the applicant and judges such as the jury’s judgement by appearance and therefore stereotyping. Some of those things mentioned in the ‘Johari Window’ are therefore more relevant than others in understanding performance assessment within screened auditions as opposed to unscreened auditions.

---


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Known to performer</th>
<th>(Typically) not known to performer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public area</strong></td>
<td><strong>Blind area</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical value</td>
<td>Performer related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Technique</td>
<td>• Attractiveness and flair eg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interpretation</td>
<td>smiling and eye contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Expression</td>
<td>• Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performer related</td>
<td>• Stage presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Performing from</td>
<td>Context related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>memory or with</td>
<td>• Communication with pianist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>music</td>
<td>• Acoustic of audition space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dress</td>
<td>Evaluator characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context related</td>
<td>• Expertise and training of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Purpose of</td>
<td>adjudicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>audition eg.</td>
<td>• Use of score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal oboe</td>
<td>• Quantity and quality of other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or 2nd oboe job</td>
<td>candidates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>characteristics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decision and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feedback about</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>audition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pre-existing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adjudicator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and candidate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Adjudicator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>history of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assessing the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>same player</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secret area</strong></td>
<td><strong>Hidden area</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performer related</td>
<td>Performer related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Effort and</td>
<td>• Variance from expressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preparation</td>
<td>norm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Quality of</td>
<td>Genes/musical potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reeds</td>
<td>Evaluator characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cognitive</td>
<td>• Mood and personality of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>processes (anxiety,</td>
<td>adjudicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confidence etc.)</td>
<td>General adjudications history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Luck and chance</td>
<td>• First impressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>events</td>
<td>• Halo effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Coping strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social pressure</td>
<td>Nonmusical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and constraints</td>
<td>• Stereotyping:subconscious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on time</td>
<td>bias according to race, gender,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Habits and</td>
<td>etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supersticions</td>
<td>• Order of player (1st, 5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consistency of</td>
<td>etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ability outside</td>
<td>and time of day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the audition</td>
<td>Measurement of error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Health and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tiredness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Travel, temperature &amp; humidity’s affect on reeds and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instrument.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Conclusion

5.1 Is practice the key to success in orchestral auditions?

Throughout exploring the question in this thesis I agree with Michael Griffin that ‘the best predictor of success is the quality and quantity of practice time.’\(^{100}\) Practice which is both effective and efficient is a large part of what determines the success of an orchestral audition. It is arguably the most important source of musical preparation for audition due to its role in the acquisition of expertise in music but it also helps the oboist's psychological state by allowing them to trust in their preparation during the performance at audition. The process of continuing to improve after reaching the level of being invited for audition at professional orchestras is of course possible and it is this dedication to ‘fine-tuning’ one's playing that allows musicians to stand out in orchestral auditions.

Practice at this level is affected by several factors:

- A musician’s commitment to continue to learn.
- Access to expert teaching.
- Trust in and honesty of the feedback and communication between teacher and student.
- The openness of the musician to tackle new learning challenges in order to truly improve.

Deliberate practice is key to success in orchestral auditions because it is both efficient; i.e. it avoids wasting time or energy, and effective. There is a proven correlation between this type of efficient practice and expert performance.

Reflecting on this thesis and on my own past auditions there are several factors which stand out to me as making a huge difference which are: knowing the music so well that one can perform with freedom and individuality, the instrument being in perfect-working order, two good reeds which are reliable and well-known, the sheet-music being organised, a feeling of calm and positivity throughout the day and being able to manage the instruments, music and accessories safely and calmly into different rooms.

A conclusion that can be drawn from the scientific literature and shared experience of established orchestral players is that practice is essential for an oboist's success at audition. It is through consistent practice of on average three to four hours as well as optimal sleep, interestingly including naps, and a dedication to managing nerves that one can achieve a high-level of performance under pressure. It may be useful for other players in a similar

position to myself auditioning that these findings indicate that these huge benefits of practice are backed by research and therefore it is this combination that is hugely beneficial in maximising chance of success.

Advice found in external sources is useful and welcome but one can only learn so much from this ‘shared experience.’ It is only through the experience of auditioning that the musician truly learns what to work on as an individual in order to succeed at audition. My first professional audition was five years ago and my way of preparation is very different now largely from experience of audition-taking and it is very likely that other musicians will find the same.

5.2 What next?

From a personal point of view this project has given me several new directions. First, I will continue to use what I have learned to prepare for my recital. Having read extensively about the importance of goal-setting and motivation I have set the goal of 8 weeks after my recital to play extra-work auditions for principal players in several UK orchestras. Practice will be key in this venture as will be expert teaching. Hallam calls for researchers to consider how best learners might be taught about ‘effective’ practice\(^\text{101}\) and I will do as much as I can to learn more about this from my own teacher and also continue to research the topic of practice.

Second, creating my own personalised excerpt book (appendix A) is the next project after my final recital and stems from a willingness to overcome my feelings of dread which accompany each new list of orchestral audition excerpts. With each excerpt list for audition it seems like starting from scratch each time; scrambling through recordings, scores and multiple excerpt books. With so many different resources why not create my own, personalised *probspiel* with accompanying text at the back? Having personal reflections and accompanying text of background information included will illuminate the most important aspects of the music, suggest what the panel might be listening for, provide suitable tempi and give relevant information.

Finally, I can continue to add to the collection of excerpts which I already have as I audition and if I am successful in gaining a seat in an orchestra it will be useful to prepare for concerts. This larger collection (appendix B) will be separate from my extra work audition pack which I want to keep concise and organised.

To conclude, this project will continue to be useful to me by supplying me with well-researched musical excerpts and pieces to take to potential employers to show them how I play. Orchestral auditions are not held very often but by being pro-active and approaching orchestras myself I can create new goals including opportunities to show oboe sections of orchestras how I play with my well-prepared material and hopefully, one day soon, find success in another audition.

---

References

Articles


Available from: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/british-journal-of-music-education/article/professional-musicians-orientations-to-practice-implications-for-teaching/0A0007378FD3D07BEF97DADB94725AB6>


**Audio Visual**


**Literature**


**Sheet Music**


Websites

Bradbury, J. Musicalchairs. <https://www.musicalchairs.info/about/>


Kageyama, N. Bulletproof Musician. 
<http://www.bulletproofmusician.com/>
Appendices

Appendix A: Personal probspiel

1st Oboe

- Beethoven Symphony No. 3: II Adagio assai, III Scherzo & IV Poco Andante
- Brahms Symphony No. 1: Movement I & II Andante Sostenuto
- Brahms Violin Concerto: II Adagio
- Mahler Symphony No. 3: II Tempo di Menuetto. Grazioso
- Mendelssohn Symphony No. 3: II Vivace non troppo
- Ravel Le Tombeau de Couperin: Prelude & Menuet
- Rossini Silken Ladder Overture: Andantino & Allegro vivace
- Strauss Don Juan: Allegro, molto con brio & a tempo ma tranquillo
- Stravinsky Pulcinella: Serenata, Gavotta, Variation 1 Allegretto
- Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 4: II Andantino

2nd Oboe

- Bartok Concerto for Orchestra: II. Giuoco delle Coppie
- Brahms Variations on a Theme by Haydn: St Anthony Chorale
- Dvorak Symphony No. 7: II Poco Adagio

Cor Anglais

- Dvorak Symphony No. 9: II Largo
- Ravel Piano Concerto in G: III Adagio assai
- Sibelius Swan of Tuonela
Appendix B: Table of orchestral excerpt asked for in three auditions 2016-2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer &amp; Piece</th>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J.S. Bach, Easter Oratorio</td>
<td>Sinfonia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Adagio - end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bartok, Concerto for Orchestra</td>
<td>II. Giuoco delle Coppie</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>a) Fig 25 – 4th of 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b) Fig 181-198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beethoven, Symphony 3</td>
<td>II. Adagio assai</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bars 8-101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>III. Allegro Vivace</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>a)80-96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b)69-96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c)206-216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IV. Allegro molto - Poco Andante</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>346-372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beethoven, Symphony 6</td>
<td>III. Merry Gathering</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlioz, Symphony Fantastique</td>
<td>I. Reveries - Passions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Last 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2/CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>III. Scene aux champs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlioz Roman Carnival</td>
<td>Overture</td>
<td>2/CA</td>
<td>Beg - Fig. 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahms Symphony 1</td>
<td>I. Un poco sostenuto</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>27-33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. Andante sostenuto</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>a) 17-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b) 38-43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahms Symphony No.2</td>
<td>II. Adagio non troppo</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>beginning until 10th of fig. A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composers</td>
<td>Piece</td>
<td>Movement</td>
<td>Section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahms</td>
<td>Violin Concerto</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahms</td>
<td>Variations on a Theme by Haydn</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debussy</td>
<td>La prèse Midi</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debussy</td>
<td>La prèse Midi</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dvorak</td>
<td>Cello Concerto</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dvorak</td>
<td>Symphony No. 7</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dvorak</td>
<td>Symphony 8</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dvorak</td>
<td>New World</td>
<td></td>
<td>CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibert</td>
<td>Escales</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahler</td>
<td>Symphony 2</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahler</td>
<td>Symphony 3</td>
<td>Tempo di Minuetto</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mendelssohn</td>
<td>Symphony 3</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozart</td>
<td>Symphony 41</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The table lists compositions and their sections for the Allegretto grazioso.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composers</th>
<th>Works</th>
<th>Sections</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mussorgsky</td>
<td>Pictures at an Exhibition</td>
<td>V Ballet des Poussins</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puccini</td>
<td>Madam Butterfly</td>
<td>Act III</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachmaninov</td>
<td>Symphonic Dances</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ravel</td>
<td>Piano Concerto in G</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ravel</td>
<td>Piano Concerto in G</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ravel</td>
<td>Daphnis &amp; Chloe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ravel</td>
<td>Piano Concerto in G</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ravel</td>
<td>Tombeau de Couperon</td>
<td>Prelude</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ravel</td>
<td>Tombeau de Couperon</td>
<td>Menuet</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rossini</td>
<td>Silken Ladder</td>
<td>Overture</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rossini</td>
<td>Silken Ladder</td>
<td>Overture</td>
<td>CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shostakovich</td>
<td>Symphony 5</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibelius</td>
<td>Swan of Tuonela</td>
<td></td>
<td>CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smetana</td>
<td>Bartered Bride</td>
<td>Overture</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Exam Concert Programme

Oboe and Cor Anglais Classical Masters
Exam Concert

22nd May/19.00/Nathan Milstein Hall

Mary Noden, Oboe & Cor Anglais
Programme

Maurice Ravel (arr. Jones)

**Le Tombeau de Couperin (1917)**

1. *Prélude (dedicated to Jacques Charlot)*
2. *Fugue (dedicated to Jean Cruppi)*
3. *Menuet (dedicated to Jean Dreyfus)*
4. *Rigadoun (dedicated to Pierre & Pascal Gaudin)*

Daniel Handsworth, Bassoon
Hugo Olsson, Clarinet
Miia Roiko-Jokela, Flute
Dennis Vasiliev, French Horn

Jean Sibelius (arr. Stacy)

**Swan of Tuonela (1895)**

Erik Lanninger, Piano

INTERVAL - 10 MINUTES

Richard Strauss (arr. Willner)

**Concerto in D Major (1945)**

1. *Andante moderato*
2. *Andante*
3. *Vivace - Allegro*

Erik Lanninger, Piano
Le Tombeau de Couperin

Ravel was preparing to write a ‘French suite’ for piano, using models from the 1700s, before the First World War began, however it was not until 1917 that he completed it. The piece then became more than an homage to the French composers of the 18th century, it was also dedicated to Ravel’s mother and friends who had died during the war. 102

The orchestral version of this piece, which Ravel produced in 1919, is regularly programmed in concerts. The challenging oboe part is often asked for at orchestral auditions, especially the first and third movements, Prélude and Menuet.

Ravel encountered some criticism because of the apparent disparity between the light-hearted characters within the work and the sombre dedication to those who died. Ravel is reported to have defended his words saying: “The dead are sad enough, in their eternal silence.” 103

Swan of Tuonela

This music first appeared in Sibelius’ opera The Building of the Boat as a dark and atmospheric prélude. Sibelius reused it, adding three other pieces to produce the Lemminkäinen Suite. The legends depicted in these tone poems centre around the figure of Lemminkäinen, a powerful young hero. Each captures an important moment in his adventures: seductions, hunts, feuds and even his own death and reincarnation.

At the top of the The Swan of Tuonela score Sibelius wrote: “Tuonela, the land of death, the hell of Finnish mythology, is surrounded by a large river of black waters and a rapid current, in which The Swan of Tuonela glides majestically, singing.” The cor anglais is, in this piece, the plaintive voice of the swan gliding serenely over lake. The black river, with its fierce currents, is depicted in the orchestral version by muted strings which are separated into thirteen lines.

102 Spiers. (n.d.).
103 Wikipedia. ‘Le Tombeau de Couperin.’
There are glimpses of light through the darkness as the music reaches C major but the tone poem ends with the swan disappearing once more into darkness. The sound world is subtle and mysterious and the solo line fades and swells over a quiet pulse and chilling chord progressions creep through the accompaniment. ¹⁰⁴

**Concerto in D Major**

Composed towards the end of Strauss’ life this concerto ranks as one of the finest works ever written for the oboe. The idea of writing a concerto for oboe was first suggested to Strauss during the American occupation of Bavaria after World War II. The American oboist John de Lancie visited Strauss at his home and he “asked him if, in view of the numerous beautiful, lyric solos for oboe in almost all his works, he had ever considered writing a concerto of oboe. He answered “No” and there was no more conversation on the subject.” ¹⁰⁵

De Lancie clearly made an impression, however, because Strauss wrote at the top of the autograph “suggested by an American soldier/oboist from Chicago.” De Lancie did not get to perform the concerto he inspired until 1964 because the conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra, where he worked, did not care for it.

It follows the Classical form of three movements, fast-slow-fast. The first movement is built from three main elements; the four sixteenth-notes figure (initially D-E-D-E) which can be heard in the cellos at the opening. The half-note followed by sixteenth-notes heard in the oboe’s opening melody. The rhythmic figure of ‘short-short-short-long’ which echoes the fate motif in Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony and Strauss’ own *Metamorphosen*, also written in 1945. The second movement begins with the same sixteenth-note theme as the opening in the accompaniment which introduces the long lyrical phrases of the oboe. After the return of the oboe melody, with a more developed accompaniment, there is a cadenza to close the movement. The finale is in a Classical rondo form with a light and dance-like refrain in 2/4. There are contrasting episodes of pastorale themes in triplet figures and again the ‘short-short-short-long’ theme. After the second cadenza the concerto begins a rustic finale *Allegro* in 6/8 and concludes with a swift coda.

¹⁰⁴ Huscher. (n.d.).
¹⁰⁵ Keller. (n.d.).